DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 332 204 CS 212 830

AUTHOR Koehnecke, Dianne Swenson
TITLE Boundaries of Graduate Assistants: Bouncing off Boundaries.
PUB DATE Mar 91
NOTE 5p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (42nd, Boston, MA, March 21-23, 1991).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Research; Employer Employee Relationship; *Graduate Students; Higher Education; Job Satisfaction; Student Role; Surveys; *Teaching Assistants; *Work Environment
IDENTIFIERS Saint Louis University MO; Student Surveys

ABSTRACT

Graduate assistants must often be the "Jack" or "Jill" of many trades. Graduate assistants at St. Louis University described a variety of boundaries they face in their multifaceted roles. Some of their major concerns were: (1) unreasonable workload; (2) isolation; (3) frenzied pace; (4) work not enjoyable; (5) difficult boss; (6) poor work environment; (7) restrictions; (8) stereotypical roles; (9) responsibility without authority; and (10) low pay. The assistants who appeared to handle the pressures the best were able to bounce off their boundaries and work within their department to implement change. Assistants who were assigned challenging tasks and given opportunities for growth within the department appeared to be able to bounce off the boundaries rather than be bombarded by them. (RS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

Boundaries of Graduate Assistants:

BOUNCING OFF BOUNDARIES

ED332204

CS212530

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Dianne Kochnecki

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BOUNCING OFF BOUNDARIES

Graduate assistants must often be the Jack or Jill of many trades. Instructing, supervising projects and people, attending various meetings, revising, editing, and proofing professor's manuscripts, coordinating department programs, and performing whatever services the department dictates are all aspects of this varied job.

Intrinsic and extrinsic boundaries often bombard the assistant. Graduate assistants at St. Louis University described a variety of boundaries they face in their multifaceted roles. The following list represents some of their major concerns:

- **An unreasonable workload** with long hours that took valuable time away from their coursework. The heavy workload was the most common complaint of graduate assistants.
- **Isolation.** Some graduate assistants said that they did not feel like they were a part of their department. They experienced little interaction with the rest of the faculty on a collegial basis.
- **Frenzied pace.** Requests from the department coming from a variety of professors who may not know what one another was asking the graduate assistant to do sometimes forced the assistant to work on several projects at once at a much faster, more hectic pace than was comfortable or even most productive for the

CS212830

department.

- **Work not enjoyable.** Some assistants were given the jobs nobody else wanted, such as running the Xerox machine.
- **Difficult boss.** Assistants who were given little or no direction or understanding of their work load said they found their job tedious. When the assistants were treated as subordinates, their work was even more unfulfilling.
- **Poor work environment.** One department had twenty-five assistants assigned to one room with one phone. Another department said their assistants had no phone.
- **Restrictions.** Not being allowed to check out audio visual materials, such as the overhead, was a constraint described by some assistants. Equipment needed to be signed out for the assistant's use by a faculty member.
- **Stereotypical roles.** Examples of the limitations assistants experienced in various department were: not being allowed to go to department meetings; being expected to remain silent at department or committee meetings; not being expected to use the "faculty" coffee machine; being expected to perform clerical duties; being expected to "know their place" with faculty members, such as calling them "Dr." instead of their first name.

- **Responsibility without authority.** Some assistants were expected to perform their jobs, such as coordinating a particular program, without being given the necessary authorization necessary to make the project work.
- **Low pay.** Assistants also voiced concerns about inequity of pay both within and between departments.

No attempt was made to put the preceding boundaries into any kind of hierarchical rating system. Although the assistants who responded to the survey said the job was important to them, because without it they would not be able to pursue their graduate studies, the ones who appeared to handle their pressures the best were able to bounce off their boundaries and work within their department to implement change. Those who appeared most satisfied with their work described a department chair who understood their pressures as well as their individual needs and worked with them. Assistants who were assigned challenging tasks and given opportunities for growth within the department appeared to be able to bounce off the boundaries rather than be bombarded by them.

Dianne Swenson Koehnecke gave a presentation on the boundaries of graduate assistants at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (4C's) in Boston on March 23, 1991.